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SUBJECT: Party Selects New (Old) Leadership; Senior
Positions Remain Unclear

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This is a joint Embassy Hanoi-ConGen HCMC report.

Summary and Comment

11. (SBU) The Communist Party closed its 10th National Party Congress (NPC) April 25 after re-electing Nong Duc Manh to the position of Party General Secretary. The Party's new Central Committee, elected April 23, also selected the new Politburo and Party Secretariat. Although many of those who had been rumored to be in line for top positions are in the new Politburo, the Party is keeping quiet about who will actually assume what job. Based on Vietnamese practice, the positions of State President, Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Assembly will not be formally announced until they receive the blessing of the National Assembly, which could be as early as mid-May or as late as December. The Congress' delegates also endorsed official Party documents such as the Political Report, which for the first time allows some Party members to engage in capitalist activities and updated the Party Statutes to reflect this change.

12. (SBU) Our initial appraisal of the new Politburo and Central Committee membership is that, with increased representation by Ministry of Public Security officials and the reduction of the total number of Politburo and Party Secretariat members, as well as the elevation of the

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Directors of the Party Control Commission, the Internal Affairs Commission and the relatively hardline Minister of Culture and Information, the Party is sending a message about its intent to address corruption and strengthen central control. Regional balance also appears not to have been a major consideration this time; southern and northern leaders prospered, at the expense of their central Vietnamese colleagues. Moreover, the lack of clarity of when exactly Vietnam's new senior leaders will be formally selected may suggest continued internal disagreement over the composition of the top leadership as well as concerns that Government and Party functions not get sidetracked during the year Vietnam hosts APEC. End Summary and Comment.

The Party's New Leaders

13. (SBU) The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) closed its 10th National Party Congress (NPC) April 25 with the

announcement of its new Politburo lineup, including the re-election of General Secretary Nong Duc Manh. In order of the number of votes the new Politburo members received from the new Central Committee, they and their current positions (which are likely to change in most cases) are:

- Nong Duc Manh - Party General Secretary
- Le Hong Anh - Minister of Public Security
- Nguyen Tan Dung - Standing Deputy Prime Minister
- Nguyen Minh Triet - Secretary of HCMC Party Committee
- Truong Tan Sang - Chairman, Party Economic Commission
- Nguyen Phu Trong - Secretary, Hanoi Party Committee
- Pham Gia Khiem - Deputy Prime Minister
- Phung Quang Thanh - Vice Minister of Defense, General Chief of Staff
- Truong Vinh Trong - Chairman, Party Internal Affairs Commission
- Le Thanh Hai - Chairman of HCMC People's Committee
- Nguyen Sinh Hung - Minister of Finance
- Pham Quang Nghi - Minister of Culture and Information
- Ho Duc Viet - Chairman of the National Assembly's Committee for Science, Technology and Environment
- Nguyen Van Chi - Chairman, Party Control Commission

¶4. (SBU) Regional balance was not a significant consideration for the Party Congress. Southerners and northerners dominate the Politburo, with HCMC having three representatives -- Triet, Sang and Hai. Our contacts told us that Ba Thanh, the brash and conservative Party Secretary of Danang, was lobbying hard for a slot on the Politburo. He was rebuffed. In contrast to previous Party pronouncements that the new Politburo would have 15-17 members, the new lineup only has 14 members. Asked to comment on this during an April 25 press conference, Party General Secretary Manh said that "there were not enough individuals who met the criteria for Politburo membership. If some appear in the future, we can consider increasing the size of the Politburo."

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¶5. (SBU) There have been some foreign press reports indicating that, as numbers two, three and four on the list, Le Hong Anh will be President, Nguyen Tan Dung will be Prime Minister and Nguyen Minh Triet will be Chairman of the National Assembly. However, virtually all of our contacts have been unwilling to speculate on whether the number of votes received (and thus position on the list) will correspond with the eventual Politburo hierarchy, cautioning us "not to read too much into it." Although rumors will continue to swirl about who will assume what position, nothing will be official until the National Assembly convenes and formally elects the new leadership. During his press conference, General Secretary Manh refused to get drawn out on the subject of personnel decisions, noting that "the National Assembly has the final word on the subject." "Please wait and see," he said.

¶6. (SBU) When exactly the National Assembly will meet to bless the leadership changes is the subject of some speculation. The National Assembly will convene again on May 16, and National Assembly member and head of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) Vu Xuan Hong told the Ambassador April 14 that the legislature's first order of business will be to discuss and approve Vietnam's new leaders. On April 23, however, senior Party official Dao Dzuy Quat (deputy director of the Party's Culture and Information Commission) floated a trial balloon in the Vietnamese press saying that the timing for the leadership handover has not been decided and suggesting that Vietnam needs "experienced leadership" in place for the November 2006 APEC summit, and so the National Assembly would wait until December to approve the new leadership slate.

¶7. (SBU) At any rate, once the National Assembly elects a new Prime Minister, the PM will nominate Cabinet ministers

for National Assembly endorsement. Current (but retiring) Deputy Prime Minister and member of the Secretariat Vu Khoan said in an interview on April 24 that cabinet ministers "do not have to be Central Committee members, or even Party members." He acknowledged, however, that their work would be "very difficult" if they are not.

New Party Secretariat

¶8. (SBU) The Party Secretariat, which handles the day-to-day management of Party affairs, was also announced. Its members (and their current positions) are:

- Nong Duc Manh - Party General Secretary
- Truong Tan Sang - Chairman, Party Economic Commission
- Truong Vinh Trong - Chairman, Party Internal Affairs Commission
- Nguyen Van Chi - Chairman, Party Control Commission
- Pham Quang Nghi - Minister of Culture and Information
- Le Van Dzung, Chief of People's Army of Vietnam's General Political Department
- Tong Thi Phong, Chairman, Party Mass Mobilization Commission
- To Huy Rua, Director, Ho Chi Minh Political Institute

¶9. (SBU) The Secretariat's Standing Member, an influential position that regulates the paper flow to the Politburo and administers many key personnel decisions, previously held by Phan Dzien, has not yet been announced. The first five of the eight members of the Secretariat listed above are concurrent members of the Politburo, which is an increase from the previous Secretariat, which had four Politburo members out of nine total Secretariat members.

New Central Committee

¶10. (SBU) On April 23, the delegates to the NPC elected the Party's new Central Committee, which has increased in size from 150 to 160 regular members, with 21 non-voting alternates. Our early assessment is that the new CC's membership does not reflect a major new direction for Vietnam, but there have been some changes from the previous committee's lineup.

¶11. (SBU) No Foreign Ministry officials were elected as regular CC members (unless one counts Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem, who is also a new Politburo member and is rumored to be in line to replace Foreign Minister Nguyen Dzy Nien, who was not a Politburo member). Interestingly, there is one MFA official among the CC alternates: Department of International Organizations Director General Pham Binh Minh,

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who is well-known as our and others' interlocutor for our respective human rights dialogues. His inclusion as a CC alternate may auger a promotion in the near future. Other prominent rumored losers for membership in the CC include: Nong Duc Manh's son, Nong Quoc Tuan, who is head of the National Youth Federation; General Nguyen Chi Vinh, an MOD General in charge of intelligence and closely associated with former conservative President Le Duc Anh; and, and Madame Pham Phuong Thao, Chairwoman of the HCMC People's Council. (The slate of 207 candidates for the CC was Qt made public.)

¶12. (SBU) At 16 out of 160 CC members, the percentage of military members of the new CC remains unchanged from the previous committee, although the ratio of "political commissars" to those in command positions has increased over the previous Central Committee. This is likely a reflection of either the increased importance of these commissars with the Vietnamese military or the decreased importance of Party credentials in the selection of military region commanders. The alternates appear to be a who's who of younger leaders

that the Party is cultivating -- many from the district level -- including the former Youth Union Chairman of HCMC.

¶13. (SBU) The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) also substantially increased its presence on the Central Committee, with six of the current eight MPS Vice Ministers plus the current Minister represented. This adds weight to the speculation that the Ministry of Public Security will divide into two ministries, a Ministry of State Security and a Ministry of Police, because even if the vice ministers not selected for the Central Committee retire, six vice ministers is too many for one Ministry. It is worth noting that the current Minister of Public Security, Le Hong Anh, was the highest vote-getter in the Politburo election after the unopposed General Secretary Manh.

¶14. (SBU) Finally, in spite of the Party's trumpeting of its new and more "democratic" style of allowing NPC delegates to nominate CC candidates, or for individuals to nominate themselves, it does not appear that any of these new-style candidates made the final cut.

Party Documents

¶15. (SBU) The NPC's delegates also voted on and approved the Political Report, which is little changed from the previous versions that had been circulated for comment -- and criticized in reformist press (reftels). Significantly, the report contains language allowing Party members to engage in capitalist activities, although the language was not nearly as open as reformists had wished. Questioned at the press conference on whether capitalists would be able to become Party members, General Secretary Manh responded that "the issue requires further study and specific regulations." In a further change meant to broaden its national appeal, the Party transformed itself from the "vanguard of the working class" to the "vanguard of the working class and the representative of the nation's interest."

Comment

¶16. (SBU) Our initial appraisal of the new Politburo and Central Committee membership is that, with increased representation by Ministry of Public Security officials and tightening of the number of officials represented in the Politburo and Secretariat, the Party is sending a message about its intent to address corruption and strengthen central control. Moreover, the lack of clarity as to when exactly Vietnam's new senior leaders will be formally elected may suggest continued internal disagreement over the composition of the top leadership, as well as an opportunistic move by the existing leadership (who are not happy about retiring) to extend their terms. Once the senior-most slots are allocated, there likely will be additional personnel maneuvers to fill other key slots, including the Party Secretaries of Hanoi and HCMC and the leadership of the Vietnam Fatherland Front.

¶17. (SBU) Embassy and ConGen HCMC will follow up with closer examinations of the new Politburo and Central Committee.

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